

GOD, DO YOU SEE MY PAIN? + + +

PASTOR GREG GRIFFITH

Good morning, church. It is our last week of our series Game On. And so if you have your booklet, I'd invite and encourage you to open it up to week five. And this week we're going to talk about the game FIFA, FIFA 26 there. And that's why I'm wearing my U.S. jersey because it was also World Cup and which got everyone excited with FIFA as well.

And we're going to walk through what it looks like to look at the life of Esther and through the game of FIFA and then conclude with what is God delivering us from this life. And so it's going to be a great, a great day and a great series. And, you know, when I was doing this, I was thinking about it like in the video game, you can actually be all of the players. So when you're playing the game, you can be every single one of the players and you can always score. You can always make the pass. You're doing all the work and all that stuff.

So then I was looking it up. And this year was the World Cup. And Lionel Messi, who is considered one of the best, if not the best soccer football player right now. Currently, he was in the World Cup finals. And so I looked it up and it was saying that he only had 54 touches, meaning he touched the ball 54 times. That equates to about three to four minutes out of 120 minute or so game, 90 minutes and an extra time and stuff like that.

I mean, why would you be the best player in the world? But only touch the ball for about three or four minutes out of the time. And that's what's going to lead us into our theme today, which is that we like Lionel Messi rely on others. He depends on his team. He depends on people doing stuff with the ball and away from the ball throughout the match. We depend on God and we depend on our team, one another as well.

And so today as we look through the life of Esther, we're going to see what does it look like to depend upon God and depend upon each other. But I also want you prepared to go out into the world and to be relevant, to kind of know what's going on. And so when you're talking to your friends and you're like, yes, our church did a whole series on Game On and we concluded today with FIFA and they go, you know, I've always wondered, what does FIFA mean? What does that even stand for? Well, I want you to be able to answer that.

So you may want to write what FIFA means in your booklet. And here's what it means. It means formation, instructed favor and assist. All right. And so now you can go out there and you go, I know what FIFA stands for. And then you can tell them a little bit about how all those things lead people to Jesus. And in a wonderful, quiet and nonassuming way, you get to share the gospel message all by sharing what FIFA stands for. So let's dive right into this formation.

So when you think about the game, FIFA, and when you play the game, FIFA, you can be everything. You can be from the center midfielder. You can be the sweeper. You can be the goalie. You can be all the positions of the field. But that's not real life. In real life soccer, you don't get to be all the positions

of the field. You get to be the position that is best for you and best for the team. So Lionel Messi, he doesn't even have the ability to walk in one day and say, you know what, coach, we've been really struggling on defense. I'm going to be the backline sweeper. He can't do that because that's not his best position, nor is that actually best for the team. So there's a formation that happens where you're forming of the team saying, this is the best team we have to accomplish our one goal together.

Our theme verse for this entire series has been from Esther 4.14. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for all the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. I want to stop right there for a minute, and I just want to make sure we're all clear about something. What the scripture is telling us is, is that Esther's being told, you have been put into a position. Now she didn't ask for any of this position she's been put into. She didn't ask to be orphaned. She didn't ask to be taken from her homeland and live in Susa. She didn't ask to be placed and taken and put into a harem. She didn't ask to be thrust into a plot to assassinate her and her loved ones, as well as all of her people.

And I want you to hear this. Please hear this today. If you don't hear anything else in this message, hear this today. God will never, ever do something to you or cause something to you to happen poorly so that he can, can do something greater out of you. That's not the way God works. God's not going to look and go, you know, if you had cancer and struggled through cancer, but then were able to talk to a family member who's, who doesn't believe and they'll come to believe because you had cancer, I'm going to give you cancer. God doesn't do that. God did not make, make Esther's family die. God did not make her become enslaved. God did not make her live into a life of a harem in order that he would deliver the people. That's not who our God is, because that's not a loving, caring, gracious God. That is a tyrant who's just bending people to his will. And that's not the God we have.

But he did allow it. And God did allow all those things to happen to Esther. God does allow us to get cancer. God does allow us to suffer. And our God has suffered as well. And what, Esther's being told here is even if you don't do this, even if you don't speak up, God will redeem and deliver his people because our God is a God who delivers. Our God is a God who restores. Our God is a God who redeems. Our God is a God who brings justice to injustice. And I love the way our confession has this. It says this, we confess for the, we confess our sins, the things that we have done and the things we have left undone. And the left undone is when we have said, I'm going to be silent.

And we've talked about this over the four weeks, right? Where God is maybe saying to you right now, like, stand up and stand out and say, I will not be a gossip. And that when you're in the midst of gossip to stop it, to walk away from it, or maybe it's, maybe it's standing up for your marriage. And maybe it's saying, you know what? I understand right now that we don't like each other, but I'm not going anywhere. Right? And sometimes we do, we do become quiet and we don't say things. God still will work through those things. God still will accomplish his will, right? As we rely upon him and as we rely on others. And so, so Esther's being told right here that, that you have, you have words to say, don't not say them. If you don't not, if you don't say them, God will still do what he does. But who knows you that you have been calm and put in this royal position for such a time as this.

And this is our theme verse that Esther was put into this place. That God has allowed this to happen. And she is there for right now. She is the one put into this place for such a time as this in order to deliver the people. This is her formation. This is the calling she has right here and right now. Now, doesn't it feel like sometimes we need to rely on our team for what have we been called to do? When I

was six years old, I was learning how to play soccer and I got on my first soccer team. We played in a league called the Billy Mitchell Soccer Club and we were six year olds. And so we weren't very good, right? Like we'd have times where it's like, you know, all the game action is happening and the kids like looking around and looking at the clouds or looking at the daffodils kind of picking them, right? All that stuff. But it was all my school friends and a couple others. And the goalie was this guy named Jay. And Jay would, once the ball would cross midfield down at the other end, Jay inevitably every time would lay down in the goalie box and put his hand on his head and he would just kind of watch from a reclined position.

And I still can hear the parents going, Jay, stand up. Jay, get up. Jay, stand. And his dad was a coach and he would yell, Jay, get up now. Right? And Jay would just lay there. Now, I like to think that Jay just totally trusted and relied on his team that we were so great as six year olds that that ball would never cross back over midfield, right? Isn't it interesting that God is a God who builds this team that is just filled with people that are perfect for a time such as this? That's what God builds. Look at the disciples. The disciples aren't a perfect team, you know? Like, I actually think that if Jesus were to answer the question for the NBA, who was the greatest of all time in the NBA, I can say to you confidently that he would not choose LeBron. Because LeBron needs to build this like perfect team in order to win some championships, right? Yeah. But the goal of the NBA is Michael, right? Michael took, yeah, Michael took just some good players, but average players, and then he built a great team around him.

This is just like Jesus. Think about this. Jesus with his disciples, right? He took a tax collector. The tax collectors are traitors. The tax collectors worked for Rome, who was occupying Israel. Rome would say to the tax collectors, we need \$1,000. The tax collectors would say to the people, you owe \$1,200. And Rome didn't care if they pocketed the \$200. So they were traitors who were stealing from their own people. They were Jews that were stealing from their own people. And then he took a zealot, and he called him a zealot to be one of his followers. What are the zealots? A zealot woke up every single day, woke up every single day. And as he got dressed, he put a knife into his tunic. And in that moment, he said, I am prepared and ready for any moment where I will be part of an insurrection to overtake the Romans and kill anyone that's working for them. So you have a tax collector who's a traitor and a zealot on the same team. You've got fishermen who were failed out, flunked out rabbis, societal outcasts. This is the team Jesus built that was perfect for such a time as this to go from 12 followers to billions of believers, to you and me.

This is the team that God has built around us today to rely on one another, to be there for each other. Where you're standing today, right now, you may not have chosen it, but it is for such a time as this, to rely on God and to rely on others. Now, I was playing the game FIFA the other day, and I haven't played it for 30 years. So it's changed a lot. Matter of fact, the only thing that hasn't changed is the opening like theme song, the woo-hoo, that still keeps going, right? But that's all that's the same in 30 years. So I was playing and I didn't know any of the buttons in the guy's house I was playing at. He's like, hey, Greg, do you know what the buttons are? I was like, no. And he's like, well, if you push this one, you sprint. He's like, on defense, if you hit this button, it turns to you, and you control the guy nearest the ball. I was like, oh, these are all helpful. So he gave me instruction, right? But after a while, I don't need more instruction. Now, I just need to play. But in real life, like Lionel Messi still has coaches. He still gets instructed. There's still lessons to learn. And we rely on those around us to give us instruction because they want us to be better. Not because they're saying we're wrong. They want us to be better. They want us to do better. They want us to flourish.

This happened with Esther in Esther 2, 19 and 20. When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she had continued to follow Mordecai's instructions. Now, she's already the queen. She doesn't have to listen to any instructions. She can say, I know it all. I've got it. I have the ear to the king. He's the only one that can actually tell me what to do. But she listens and she receives that instructions humbly. I think in our humanity, so often, we get ready where we say, I already know everything.

I don't need instructions anymore. Right? So my college roommate played soccer with me, and he said, I don't need instructions anymore, because I already know what to do. I don't need instructions anymore. Right? So my college roommate played soccer for Concordia University, Irvine, and we had new coaches every year. And so at Concordia University, Irvine, there, and you're going to see a picture of the current team that's out there right now. But at Concordia, they weren't very good at soccer, and especially during my roommate's time there. And in his third year, his third set of coaches, this was a new coach section where they were, they were co-coaches, co-head coaches, they were trying something new, as they were so bad.

And we went to school in Irvine, California. So it's 15 minutes from Newport Beach, 15 minutes from Disneyland. Not really sure why anyone chooses any other Concordia around the nation, because that's like living wise, it's amazing. I mean, I don't, I also don't understand how anyone actually graduates from Concordia, because living wise, it's amazing. But, but they played a school in our conference called Fresno Pacific University. Now Fresno, California is in the middle of the state. It's agriculture town. And it's known as the armpit of California. I mean, it's just no one wants to go to Fresno. It's about six hours away. So these coaches said to the team, we're going to leave. And they were an NAIA school. So they drove on 15 passenger white vans. They said, we're going to leave, we got a six hour, or we got to drive up to Fresno, and they picked the time to leave. Well, it was too short of a time to leave. Tom, Tom went to them right away and said, hey, guys, like, we're not going to make it in time to warm up and to be prepared and to be at our best. And they said, Tom, you worry about the game, we'll worry about getting you there. And it's like, fine. So they get in, they go. And midway at the midway point, they pull over and they say, guys, we're all going to get out, get some lunch, stretch your legs. Tom goes, guys, we don't have time for this. I can already tell you, we're going to barely make it just in time. And they go, Tom, get yourself mentally ready to be a goalie. We'll get us there. Don't worry about it. Tom says, fine.

So as they're driving, it's game time. They're still in the car. Coaches say, guys, we're going to be a little bit late. You need to change now. They showed up 20 minutes late to their game. No practice time. They had to get on the pitch and they had to play and they got demolished. Right now, these two coaches were not willing to be instructed. Sometimes in our lives, we get that way. Grandparents, are you willing to listen to your children? Workers, are you willing to listen to a coworker, not just your boss? Parents, are you willing to listen to your parents? Right. Are we willing to listen to one another? Teenagers. I mean, I don't, I have a teenager who's, you know, in 14. We already know their willingness to be instructed, right? So it comes around, comes full circle later. But are you willing to be instructed by, like in our culture, this is hard. This is why we struggle when we see someone not doing something necessarily even wrong, but just going, there's a better way. We struggle to say, are you open to feedback? Are you open to advice?

I want to ask you, what is the posture where you have, you've maybe quietly stopped taking instruction? And are you willing now to allow, to be dependent on others to help you flourish, to help you do better? Because God calls us in reliance to actually take instruction, no matter what stage or what position we have in our life. And you see this throughout the scriptures. Do you know who didn't take instruction in the scriptures? The Pharisees and the Sadducees. They said, we got it all figured out. We know God. We have every single law. We can follow everything. As long as you do what we say, you're going to be fine. And heaven forbid anyone tell them anything different. We are to be people who rely on one another to correct us, to rebuke us, to encourage us, and to equip us, which means that helps us to flourish when we're open to listening to one another as a team.

And that brings us to the favor, right? Favor we have with one another. And when you play FIFA, you have teammates and you have things where you give them favor, like you like them, or you pick a team and you go, this is the team I really like, and I want to give favor to this team. I want this team to do well. I want this player to do well. And so you try to get a player to score and you want that player to have better stats, right? And this is what happens in Esther. Esther 2, 15 and 17. When the turn came for Esther to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Haggai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor. Everyone was wanting her to flourish. They liked her. They said, we want you to do well. Your success is now our success. And so they wanted her to everyone who had her favor. Now, the king also was attracted to Esther more than any of the other women. And she won his favor. The king now looks and says, I want Esther to have success. Her success is my success. So he set the royal crown upon her.

When we have a team that says we're willing to walk with you in the heights and the depths, we're for you. We want you to flourish. We really know what it is to be in community. Do we not? So like I said, our school getting walloped by Fresno Pacific because we were 20 minutes late, that really didn't change the outcome of what would have been the game. It might have been better, actually, if we had been able to forfeit that game. But the reality is Concordia in my four years there and my roommates four years as a soccer goalie there, they were over those four years in conference play, they were 4-36. They won two games one year. The rest of the year, that was their height of winning in conference play. They were that bad. But no matter what, they knew as a team that they were united together. They stepped onto the pitch each and every time saying, I want others to succeed. It never became about their own stats, their own goals, their own things. They were always working for the team. And this is the favor that we have, that we're for one another. We want to help one another. There's no fun in scaling a mountaintop and getting to the very height of the summit by yourself and going, good job. And life's at its worst when we walk through the valleys and we don't walk in favor with other people.

You see, when we have favor with each other, we know we're never alone. We know that we have people in relationship walking with us every step of the way. Even Jesus did that when he went onto the mountain of transfiguration and he took Peter, James, and John. When Jesus would go off to pray and he would take a few others. Or when Jesus commanded the disciples, said, go out two by two to the houses. And when you're rejected, wipe the dust off of your shoes and move to the next house. You're not alone in the disappointments of life. This is a relationship that we build with each other as we rely on one another to celebrate together and to journey through difficulties together. Because we're for one another and we have favor with one another.

Where are you walking right now and working where you need to rely on others? Where do you need someone to help you get to the mountaintop? Where do you need someone to walk through a valley?

Or where is someone actually relying on you right now in one of their darkest times? Or where you're helping them get to a success that they've never experienced? How are you relationally giving favor and reaching out with each other? That's the Jesus way.

And lastly, in FIFA, we have our assist. Now in the game, like an assist is when you make a pass and then that player scores the goal. You've helped the player score the goal. Without you, the goal wouldn't have happened. They get the credit, they get the victory, but you as a team get the entire victory and you have the assist. You've brought them somewhere. Now, I want to share with you this. This is so fascinating. This is going to, this is, well, it blows my mind. I kind of hope it blows your mind. We've gone through this book of Esther, right? And all of these things that have been happening about Esther. And I want you to notice how the book ends in chapter 10, verses 1 through 3. This is the very end of the book. What's the book called again? Esther, in the very last chapter, she's not even mentioned or talked about. It's about King Xerxes giving his assist to Mordecai. That Mordecai is going to have the power of the king because he's benevolently given it to him.

Friends, this is what God does for you and for me. God gives you the greatest assist that we need. An assist over sin, death, and the devil. The assist where he passes us off and he wants to see you victorious over your own death, victorious over the sins that Satan tempts you with, victorious over all of the things that plague us and all the sins and the scars that are upon us. He wants you to have that victory. He wants you to score that goal over Satan and to say you won all for the glory of God. How do we know? Because even in his full humanity, in his full humanity, Jesus needed an assist as he was walking on that path to Golgotha, to Calvary. And remember what happened when he stumbled and fell? Simon of Cyrene picked up the cross beam and carried it for Jesus to where Jesus would hang on that cross and would give the greatest assist to all humankind for all time. To say that you at your last breath as believers and followers of Jesus, not because of anything you've done, but because of his great love for who you are, would say, Today you are with me in everlasting paradise. That's his assist to you. His life for you.

And not only do we have the assist from God, we have assists from each other where God sends one another around us in relationship to support us, to encourage us, to lift us up, to cheer us on and be your greatest cheerleader. And to know that while you see that person as your cheerleader, there's a cloud of witnesses that are also cheering you on as well. Happy to see you flourish, to be victorious over the sin, the death, and the devil. Think this past month, who is someone that God has put in your life that's given you an assist, that's helped you, that's lifted you up, that at the end of the story shines a light on you all for the glory of God.

And you know, as we conclude this series, can we just conclude it in the way that God delivers in this story? Remember, Esther is one of two books where his name is never mentioned, and yet he is between every line and every verse. In Esther 9, 27 and 28, there's a celebration that still continues this day. The Jews took it upon themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who would join them would not fail to observe two days every year in a way that is prescribed and at the time that is appointed. And these days should be remembered and observed in every generation, by every family, and in every province, and in every city. And these days of Purim, which means deliverance, that the Jews were delivered from the hands of him who decided that he wanted to hurt them, would never fail to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of these days ever die out among their descendants. And today, the Jews continue to celebrate Purim. To this very day, this word is continued to be remembered through every generation of the Jewish people.

As you and I as Christians, this is a foreshadowing of what God would do for us to celebrate every single day of an eternal deliverance. A final deliverance. When this is the one where Esther said to Haman, Game on! You want to annihilate my people? I will speak up. Game on! It's a foreshadowing of when Jesus said to Satan, when he thought he got the last laugh, when he thought that God would punish us and give us wrath for the death of God was done, Jesus said to Satan, Game on! Because today, at my death, on that final breath, and at my resurrection through the empty tomb, I will pronounce to all of the world for all time that all of my people will be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and the victory is yours. Game on, Satan!

And we... And we celebrate this deliverance, not annually, just on Easter Sunday, Christian friends. That every single Sunday is an Easter victory that says to Satan, Game on! The victory is won! You are done! Amen? Amen.

Stand up now. Let us pray as we say, Game on! Every single day and celebrate the deliverance of Christ. Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you that you did send your Son. That through the life of Esther, we saw his foreshadowing. We saw his victory. And we experienced that full victory at the empty tomb, O Lord. And today, now, and every day, we shout, Game on! Knowing that the victory is won. That we have won and triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. And it is all by the glory and the power of your holy name. Not because of anything that we have done, but because of the immense amount of love which he has poured out upon us through the cross. So today, O Lord, let us go forth sharing, showing, and savoring. As we celebrate the deliverance of Jesus. And our deliverance over sin, death, and the devil. Today, tomorrow, and forever. And all of God's people said, Amen and Amen.